

The Traditional Marketplace: Serious leisure and recommending authentic travel

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传统市场：严肃的休闲和推荐真实的旅行

Abstract

Services reliant on revenue generated from tourism are often beholden to how authentic visitors perceive their offering to be. From a managerial perspective, this is exacerbated when they serve a dual-purpose, as both actively ingrained in local culture and as showcased international tourist attractions. As such, this study contributes to Kolar and Žabkar's (2010) consumer-based model of authenticity by assessing the relationships between serious leisure, object-based and existential authenticity, and visitor word-of-mouth recommendations in Iranian cultural tourism. Utilising PLS-SEM, and drawing upon responses from 615 visitors to the Tabriz Grand Bazaar, it thus extends the model's applicability to the developing Middle-Eastern context. The results extend extant research by emphasizing the importance of object-based authenticity, as opposed to existential authenticity, in stimulating positive visitor word-of-mouth recommendations. Consequently, this study advances the prevailing understanding of the role of authenticity in stimulating positive behavioural intentions by highlighting how destinations can stimulate visitor recommendations.

依赖于来自旅游收入的服务业往往感激于游客是如何看待所提供的服务有多正宗及其真实性。从管理的角度来看，这加剧了服务的双重用途，既积极植根于当地文化又展示了国际旅游景点。因认识到这一点，本研究通过评估严肃休闲，基于对象和存在的真实性与访客口碑推荐之间的关系，在对伊朗文化旅游研究不足的情况下为Kolar和Žabkar (2010) 基于消费者的真实性模型做出贡献。利用PLS-SEM，并利用来自Tabriz Grand Bazaar 的615名访客的回应，从而将该模型的适用范围扩展到了发展中的中东地区。结果扩展了现有的研究，强调了基于对象的真实性的重要性，而不是存在的真实性，以鼓励访客的正面口碑宣传。因此，本研究通过强调目的地（或其中的网站）如何激励访客推荐，提高了普遍理解真实性在激发积极行为意向方面的作用。

Keywords: Authenticity, Serious Leisure, Recommendation, Bazaar, Word-of-Mouth.

关键词：真实性，严肃的休闲，推荐，集市，口碑

Introduction

Balancing short-term financial performance and long-term sustainability is an enduring challenge for those managing consumption-centric tourist sites. In particular, issues surrounding heritage commoditization and visitor perceptions with regards to the undermining of serious leisure sites' authenticity require constant managerial vigilance (Kolar & Žabkar, 2010; Magee & Gilmore 2015). Visitor perceptions of the authenticity of a site, experience, or destination are influential in determining their likelihood of revisiting it or acting as ambassadors by recommending it to others (Bryce, Curran, O'Gorman, & Taheri, 2015; Kolar & Žabkar, 2010; Zhou, Zhang, & Edelman, 2013). However, the interplay between serious leisure motivations, visitor perceptions of authenticity, and subsequent visitor word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations within the service industries (e.g. tourism) is under-investigated in Middle-Eastern contexts, such as Iran. Here, the development of tourist sites represents an economic priority, which can further complicate site managers' tasks.

With a range of architectural and historical offerings (UNESCO, 2017a), Iran's tourism industry has been identified as a priority growth sector due to its ability to contribute to an economy recovering from plummeting oil prices and international sanctions (Butler, O'Gorman, & Prentice, 2012). Key amongst Iran's tourism offerings are the corpus of traditional marketplaces known as Bazaars. Dating from antiquity, these venues of commerce are woven into the fabric of Iranian culture (McMillan, 2002), yet simultaneously serve visitors attracted by their unique atmosphere and comprehensive catalogue of destination-specific wares (McMillan, 2002). The Iranian bazaars have maintained their position as genuine social and commercial exchange points for locals, while also becoming mainstays of the country's tourist product, showcasing national heritage, culture, and craftsmanship to create unique visitor experiences (Hanachi & Yadollahi, 2011; UNESCO, 2017b). As well as being attracted to the heritage of such sites, their ambience, and the range of goods for sale,

research suggests tourists also find experiential appeal in the negotiation process associated with purchases made at bazaars (Thompson et al., 2017).

However, this interplay between tourists, locals, and the wider national culture can result in friction and increased challenges pertaining to perceived authenticity (Madoeuf & Snider, 2012; Värlander, 2009), which may provoke incongruence between the reality experienced by locals and their country's carefully crafted and projected national brand (Sanin, 2017). Similarly, the often conflicted interests of tourists and locals can give rise to the growth of 'inauthentic' offerings, as features of genuine culture become commoditised for touristic consumption (Madoeuf & Snider, 2012; Ryan & Gu, 2010). However, the re-orientation of sites from the 'organic' towards more carefully curated and managed states can diminish the experiences of visitors, particularly those seeking authentic cultural experiences congruent with serious leisure pursuits (Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003; MacCannell, 1973).

Nevertheless, understanding visitors' expectations with regards to authenticity is important in enabling managers to maintain successful sites and curate memorable experiences for tourists (Lee & Chang 2016; Matheson 2008). While investigations into authenticity note its cultural dependency, empirical research overlooks the challenge of maintaining perceptions of authenticity in Middle-Eastern service industry settings, particularly in relation to Iranian Bazaars (Bryce et al., 2015; Kolar & Žabkar, 2010; Madoeuf & Snider, 2012). Consequently, this study contributes to the consumer-based model of authenticity (CBA) (Kolar & Žabkar, 2010) by investigating the influence of serious leisure motivations on tourists' perceptions of authenticity, and resultant WOM recommendation within the Tabriz Grand Bazaar context.

The CBA examines culturally motivated tourists' authenticity perceptions and their subsequent levels of loyalty (Kolar & Žabkar, 2010). The model has been assessed

previously; to explore tourist attitudes to calligraphic landscapes in relation to authenticity and loyalty in Chinese and Japanese cultural contexts (Bryce et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2013), and to investigate authenticity at re-constructed Japanese tourist sites, and their influence on visitor engagement and loyalty (Bryce et al., 2015; Taheri et al., 2017). This study responds to calls for additional investigation into visitor perceptions of authenticity in Middle-Eastern settings by further adapting the model (Bryce et al., 2015; Kolar & Žabkar, 2010; Zhou et al., 2013).

Literature Review

Authenticity

Authenticity is characterised by its breadth and complexity (Spracklen 2011; Reisinger & Steiner 2006), and extant research categorises it into three distinct forms: object-based (the historical provenance of an object or place); existential (the spirit of and emotional response attributable to an object or place); and constructive (where objects or places are developed specifically for tourist consumption experiences capitalising on reimagined cultural heritage) (Bryce et al., 2015; de Vries & Go, 2017; Kolar & Žabkar, 2010; Wang, 1999). Given its focus on the inherent traditional and historic, and not reimagined, aspects of authenticity, this study follows the CBA (Kolar & Žabkar, 2010) by further investigating its object-based and existential forms.

Object-Based Authenticity

Object-based authenticity, or "...how people see themselves in relation to objects" (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006 p. 74), centres on both tourists' desire to visit and experience cultural sites, alongside their wish to acquire genuine art, craft, and object-related knowledge (Kolar & Žabkar, 2010). Consequently, objects and physical artefacts can contribute significantly to tourists' perceptions of authenticity (Waitt, 2000). Tourists' evaluation of object-based authenticity is twofold, assessing the artefact itself and its provenance (Naoi, 2004; Waitt,

2000), while allowing for the feelings generated by the object to be considered (de Vries & Go, 2017; Kolar & Žabkar, 2010; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999). In relation to Bazaars, object-based authenticity could be influenced by factors including the architecture of the bazaar, its originality, and its date of construction.

Existential Authenticity

Existential authenticity is concerned with the object-free aspects of activities or experiences (Kolar & Žabkar, 2010; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). It is comprised of two parts (Wang, 1999): inter-personal and intra-personal feelings. The inter-personal component relates to natural feelings and the intra-personal to self-made feelings (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Kolar & Žabkar, 2010). Thus, existential authenticity could be derived from historical narratives, or personal visitor-site connections associated with bazaars which convey the spirit of such attractions. The importance of existential authenticity within the context of tourism is well-established (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Kolar & Žabkar, 2010; Zhou et al., 2013). Recent research investigating the influence of existential authenticity upon tourist motivation alludes to varying degrees of linkage between object-based authenticity, attitude, loyalty and cultural motivation, and suggests that relationships between these concepts are influenced by aspects of culture and context, warranting further investigation (Kolar & Žabkar, 2010; Zhou et al., 2013). Consequently, we hypothesise:

H1: There is a relationship between perceived object-based and existential authenticity.

Serious leisure

Stebbins (1992, p.3) defines serious leisure as "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is sufficiently substantial and interesting for a participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of its special skills and knowledge". However, Stebbins (1992) also emphasises that remuneration is not a necessary pre-requisite

of serious leisure consumption, although those engaged in serious leisure can often gain through the expansion of social circles, or through maintaining good health (Cheng, Stebbins, & Packer 2016).

Distinguished from casual leisure activities, where rewards are typically instantaneous and training requirements and time-intensity are minimal, serious leisure activities embody six qualities which together render them unique; perseverance, career potential, required effort for skill and knowledge development, receipt of prolonged benefit, growing association of practitioner and activity, and development of unique social worlds around the activity (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; Brown, 2007; Gould, Moore, McGuire, & Stebbins, 2008; Stebbins, 1982, 1992, 1999). Consequently, tourists seeking to fully appreciate the architectural, historical, and cultural offerings of bazaars may undertake research prior to their visit.

Serious leisure has received scant attention in relation to tourist consumption practices (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013). However, it has been considered in relation to tourist motivations, and is an active component of various tourism activities (Prentice, 2004; Puczkó, 2010). The literature attests to the relationship between serious leisure and service related industries. For example, Stebbins (1982) suggests that aspects of serious leisure are related to elements of identity and self-connection, while Barbieri and Sotomayor (2012) question serious leisure's significance as a motivator for surfing experience consumption. Moreover, serious leisure influences visitors' engagement with tourism attractions (Taheri, Jafari, & O'Gorman, 2014), and may stimulate tourist's perceptions of a site's authenticity (Bryce et al., 2015). Serious leisure was originally conceptualised as a higher-order multidimensional construct comprising of two dimensions. Taheri et al. (2014, p.325) propose two dimensions for evaluating serious leisure in the tourism and leisure field: reflective motivation i.e., "enjoyment based enrichment" and recreational motivation i.e.,

“self and identity projects”. Nonetheless, extant understanding of the influence of serious leisure on tourist perceptions of site, experience, or destination authenticity remains underdeveloped. Thus, it is hypothesised:

H2: Serious leisure has a positive relationship with object-based authenticity.

H3: Serious leisure has a positive relationship with existential authenticity.

WOM recommendation

Given the experiential nature of tourism, WOM recommendations are considered particularly credible and significant (Confente, 2015; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). WOM can be described as communication relating to a product, service, or brand directed from a non-commercial source (‘sender’) to a ‘receiver’ (Arndt, 1967; Confente, 2015; Litvin et al., 2008). ‘Senders’ are typically colleagues, friends, or acquaintances, and WOM is considered as being a particularly valuable and effective tool in relationship marketing (Wang, 2009). E-WOM interactions can also take place between strangers in online environments, such as travel blogs and social media (Buttle, 1998; Litvin et al., 2008; Wang, 2012). WOM recommendations have been explored in service industry contexts (Confente, 2015; Lee & Chang 2012; Litvin et al., 2008; Wang, 2009); with Groeger and Buttle (2014) noting a positive relationship between homophily and heightened WOM transmission.

Positive WOM recommendations can enhance tourists’ destination image and awareness (Confente, 2015; Gannon et al., 2017; Phillips, Wolfe, Hodur, & Leistritz, 2013) while, outside of the tourism context, WOM can enhance consumer purchase intentions and heighten their post-purchase evaluations (Buttle, 1998; Litvin et al., 2008; O'Neill, Palmer, & Charters, 2002). Conversely, negative WOM recommendations represent a significant threat to the reputation of affected organisations (Buttle, 1998; Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2003). Given this, improved understanding of the development and support of WOM

recommendations is of particular interest to service sector managers and policy makers, who may benefit from a deeper understanding of the influence serious leisure and perceptions of authenticity can have on enhancing WOM recommendations (Confente, 2015; Litvin et al., 2008). Consequently, we hypothesise:

H4: Object-based authenticity has a positive relationship with WOM recommendation.

H5: Existential authenticity has a positive relationship with WOM recommendation.

H6: There is a positive relationship between serious leisure and WOM recommendation.

The study addresses the theoretical gap arising from a lack of understanding relating to serious leisure, perceived authenticity, and visitor recommendations within service industry research. In doing so, it further assesses Kolar and Žabkar's (2010) CBA to by considering serious leisure motivations (Stebbins, 1982), and WOM recommendations (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002) in an Iranian tourism context. The model (**Figure 1**) posits a relationship between object-based and existential authenticity (H1), along with a relationship between serious leisure and both object-based and existential authenticity (H2 and H3) (Bryce et al., 2015). This study also hypothesises a relationship between object-based authenticity, existential authenticity, and WOM recommendations (H4 and H5), and serious leisure and WOM recommendations (H6) (Buttle, 1998; Confente, 2015; Phillips et al., 2013; Taheri et al., 2017).

[Figure 1 Here]

Methodology

Procedures and Participants

A mainstay of the historic Silk Road, the bazaar complex in Tabriz has served as the commercial centre of Iran's East-Azerbaijan province since the 13th century and remains one of the world's largest and best-preserved examples of a traditional marketplace (UNESCO, 2016). Bazaars and contemporary shopping centres differ significantly, with the Tabriz Bazaar serving to showcase Iranian culture to international tourists, whilst maintaining its relevance as a hub of commercial and social exchange for the local population (Hanachi & Yadollahi, 2011; McMillan, 2002). Unlike their modern-day shopping counterparts, Bazaars are typically located in central urban areas such as the Grand Bazaar Istanbul, and act as focal points for the residential communities that have developed around them (Madoeuf & Snider 2012). The tendency for a central location, consequently renders them easily accessible attractions for visiting tourists. As this study seeks to investigate the influence of visitors' serious leisure motivations upon perceptions of authenticity and subsequent WOM recommendations, the dual-pronged nature of the Tabriz Bazaar in Iran represents an appropriate setting in which to explore these phenomena. A self-administered survey served as the data collection process. Judgmental sampling was used in this study as it is an effective way of collecting data when the aim is theoretical advancement rather than generalizability (Wells et al., 2016). Given Tabriz Bazaar's issues with overcrowding, the administration of an on-site survey was considered overly challenging. Therefore, data collection was conducted on international tourists at three hotels in Tabriz and at Tabriz International Airport. The research team looked into all member hotels of the Official Organization for Tourism and Tourism in Iran (ITTO) in city of Tabriz (ITTO, 2017). From this, the three hotels were selected as they receive the highest number of international tourists.

Following a pilot test on 40 tourists, minor modifications were made to the survey instrument. The data collection process was supported by a team of research assistants with

fluent English language skills. Respondents were initially asked if they had visited the Grand Bazaar in Tabriz, resulting in 615 usable surveys being collected over a 3-month period in 2015. Surveys were completed by respondents from the Middle-East and Asia (43.4%), the EU (13.3%), and other regions (43.4%). Respondents were 40.8% female and 59.2% male, with 36.7% aged between 18-35 years, 31.7% between 36-45 years, and 31.6% 46 years old or above.

Measures

Measures were adapted from established constructs in order to maximise the content validity of our model. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following constructs. The serious leisure higher-order construct consisted of two dimensions: reflective (4-items) and recreational (4-items) motivation, which were adapted for use in the tourism leisure context by Taheri et al. (2014), and originally derived from the 72-item SLIM index (Gould et al., 2008). MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Jarvis (2005, p.715) argue that a higher order measurement “faithfully represents all of the conceptual distinctions that the researcher believes are important, and it provides the most powerful means of testing and evaluating the construct”. We also drew upon the 4-item object-based authenticity and 6-item existential authenticity scales used by Kolar and Žabkar (2010). A 4-item WOM recommendation construct was adapted from Maxham and Netemeyer (2002). Response scales, ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree” were used throughout. The study further controlled for the influence of demographic characteristics including age, gender, and education based on the intimations of their influence (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007; Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004) **Table 1** shows the list of items for each construct.

[Table 1 Here]

Common method variance

Data collected from self-reported participant responses may be subject to common method variance (CMV) (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Several steps were undertaken in order to curtail this: (1) we ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of participants; (2) we placed the dependent and independent constructs in different parts of our questionnaire; (3) we used Harman's single-factor test. All variables were loaded into an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). EFA findings demonstrated the existence of five factors with eigenvalues larger than 1, with the first factor accounting for only 41.057 percent of the total variance. Therefore, CMV is not a concern for our data.

Analytical procedure

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed to test our conceptual model as it provides robust results for both normal and non-normal distributional properties (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014; Wells, Taheri, Gregory-Smith, & Manika, 2016). Skewness and kurtosis were calculated for each item of the questionnaire and were assessed against acceptable values, between -3 and +3 (Mardia, 1970). Findings indicated that the assumption of normality was violated; hence PLS-SEM is suitable for this study (Hair et al., 2014). PLS-SEM can be employed for reflective, formative, and hierarchical modes (Hair et al., 2014). SmartPLS 3.2.4 software was used to test both measurement and structural models (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2014).

Results

Reflective measurement models

We used EFA with Oblique rotation to test for uni-dimensionality for the WOM recommendation, object-based authenticity, and existential authenticity reflective constructs, and all factor loadings exceeded the minimum threshold ($\geq .40$) under each construct (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). The researchers undertook tests for convergent and

discriminant validity in order to guarantee that the items of each construct assess what they are supposed to evaluate. As shown in **Table 1**, the Cronbach's α s for all first-order reflective constructs reached the recommended threshold of .70 (Hair et al., 2010), thus the first-order constructs are internally consistent. Composite reliability (CR) was above the suggested threshold (0.70). Construct differentiation (i.e. discriminate validity) was achieved through two approaches: (1) Fornell and Larcker (1981)'s criterion, which requires a construct's average variance extracted (AVE) to be larger than the square of its largest correlation with any construct (see **Table 2**). The AVEs were higher than .5. The correlation among all first-order constructs were lower than the .70 cut-off value, thus they were distinct from one another. Finally, all items showed the largest loadings on their intended constructs, and all factor loadings were higher than .6 and significant (**Table 1**). (2) Nonetheless, Henseler, Ringle and Satsredt (2015) and Wells et al. (2016) have recently criticised Fornell and Larcker's (1981) discriminant validity approach and they suggest an alternative technique, based on the multi trait-multimethod matrix, to test discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, using HTMT, discriminant validity has also been established as all findings of the HTMT_{.85} criterion (ranging between .316 and .639) were lower than the suggested threshold of .85.

[Table 2 Here]

Higher-order measurement model

We employed several steps in order to endorse the reliability and validity of serious leisure as a higher-order construct. EFA, with Oblique rotation, was used to test whether serious leisure was comprised of two dimensions. Serious leisure was subsequently found to be a second-order construct represented by two first-order dimensions, with all factor loadings above the cut-off value of .40 for each dimension. As shown in **Table 1** and **Table 2**, CR, AVE, factor

loadings and Cronbach's α exceeded the recommended thresholds. Subsequently, our two first-order constructs met this requirement.

Following Becker, Klein, and Wetzels (2012) and Lee, Hallak, and Sardeshmukh (2016), we employed a repeated measures approach in order to estimate the hierarchical component models (HCMs) in PLS-SEM. We reflectively assigned all items to their respective first-order constructs. We then assigned all items to the second-order serious leisure construct. Finally, we reflectively linked the relationship between first-order constructs to the second-order construct. The findings indicate that the relationship between the second-order construct and two first-order constructs were significant ($p < .001$) and above the required threshold of .70 (Becker et al., 2012). The R^2 for each first-order dimension was higher than .50, suggesting that the serious leisure second-order construct explores more than 50% of the variance in its dimensions (Hair et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2016) (see also **Figure 2**). As a result, serious leisure can be considered as a second-order reflective construct represented by two lower-order dimensions.

[Figure 2 Here]

Structural model and key findings

Table 3 shows Cohen's effect sizes (f^2), path coefficients, and t -values for all direct paths. For each significant effect in the measurement model, we used Cohen's effect sizes (f^2), which signifies .02 for small, .15 for medium, and .35 for large effects (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). The results indicate that all f^2 values exceed .02 in our model. We used SRMR (standardized root mean square residual) for the model fit criterion. A value of .063 was observed for this study, which is smaller than suggested value of .08 (Henseler et al., 2014). Normed Fit Index (NFI) was also calculated. NFI value was .92; larger than recommended value of .9 ($NFI > .9$) (Henseler, Hubona & Ray, 2016). The model explained

.204% of object-based authenticity, .537% of existential authenticity and .528% of WOM recommendations. We confirmed our hypotheses via the interpretation of path coefficients using the nonparametric bootstrapping procedure (**Table 3**).

In support of H1, we found a positive relationship between object-based authenticity and existential authenticity ($\beta=.307, p<.001$). The findings revealed significant, positive relationships between serious leisure and object-based authenticity (H2: $\beta=.452, p<.001$) and existential authenticity (H3: $\beta=.541, p<.001$). We identified a positive relationship between object-based authenticity and WOM recommendations (H4: $\beta=.615, p<.001$). However, we found that existential authenticity did not have a significant relationship with WOM recommendations, rejecting H5. Finally, serious leisure exerted positive effect on WOM recommendations (H6: $\beta=.196, p<.001$). With regards to the control variables, the results suggest that only age had a significant negative influence on WOM recommendations. The results indicated no significant links amongst gender, education, and WOM recommendations.

The PLS-SEM findings suggest the possible existence of mediating relationships within our model. In order to explore this we used the method of confidence intervals (CI) suggested by Williams and MacKinnon (2008) and Lee et al. (2016) via bootstrapping analysis. Consequently, we discovered that there is an indirect relationship between serious leisure and WOM recommendations through object-based authenticity (95% CI = [.186, .358]). As the direct effect was significant, the result reveal that object-based authenticity partially mediates the impact of serious leisure on WOM recommendations.

[Table 3 Here]

Conclusions and Implications

Those managing functioning, historical tourist sites, such as Iranian Bazaars, face challenges routed in maintaining the site's relevance and respecting the site's importance to locals whilst simultaneously ensuring it appeals to international visitors. This research answers the call to further assess Kolar and Žabkar's (2010) CBA in alternative cultural contexts. In doing so, it explores the relationship between serious leisure, object-based and existential authenticity, and the subsequent WOM recommendations of tourist site visitors. While scholars have noted a need to investigate perceptions of authenticity and serious leisure in marketplace and service environments, and their influence on visitor post-consumption behaviour, little research has been undertaken in doing so in a Middle-Eastern context.

The central aim of this study was to establish the relevance of the theoretical model by investigating the interplay between serious leisure, perceptions of authenticity, and resultant WOM recommendations amongst visitors to the Tabriz Bazaar in Iran. Six hypothesised direct effects were tested. Using post-hoc analysis, we also tested for possible indirect effects in the study. The results empirically demonstrate the appropriateness of the theoretical model components and contribute to theoretical understanding (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; Bryce et al., 2015; Kolar & Žabkar, 2010; Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). Our results also provide empirical support for the assertion that serious leisure is a second-order construct represented by two significant first-order dimensions, and justify the use of the serious leisure measurement scale developed by Taheri et al. (2014), derived from the 72-item serious leisure inventory (Gould et al., 2008).

Serious leisure was shown to be a strong motivator for site visitation, through exhibiting positive relationships with object-based and existential authenticity, and WOM recommendations. Serious leisure is most strongly related to existential authenticity, which is perhaps reflective of the contribution that pre-travel preparation and knowledge of the site, symptomatic of serious leisure motivated visitors (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; Gould et al.,

2008), has on stimulating appreciation of the existential attributes inherent within the Tabriz Bazaar. In the case of the Tabriz Bazaar, this could be manifest as historical knowledge, highlighting the provenance of contemporary activities occurring at the site which, if met, further enhances tourists' perceptions of the authenticity of their experience. Extant literature suggests that a positive relationship does not exist between serious leisure and existential authenticity within the context of Japan, although it was shown to be stimulated by perceptions of object-based authenticity (Bryce et al., 2015). However, Japan's cultural and philosophical distinctiveness, which highlights the value of physical impermanence (Taheri et al., 2017), along with a necessity to accept reconstructed heritage sites derived from war damage, natural disaster, and a preference for organic building materials (Bryce et al., 2015), curtails the transferability of extant research findings (Bryce et al., 2015; Taheri et al., 2017). Addressing the cultural and contextual specificities within this study, site managers may seek to furnish prospective visitors with additional site information, with the aim of stimulating existentially authentic experiences. Practically, this could be achieved through development of immersive mobile phone applications which incorporate audio-visual technology in order to help connect the visitor to the site's history in a seamless and accessible fashion. Additionally, site managers should consider ensuring that historical site information is integrated into marketing communication initiatives undertaken to promote the bazaar.

Serious leisure exhibited a marginally weaker relationship with object-based authenticity, highlighting the continued importance of communicating and sustaining an authentic offering for visitors routed in the prevalence and accessibility of artefacts and tangible items, and the associated importance of satisfying the enhanced object-based expectations of tourists motivated by a desire to undertake serious leisure pursuits. This further emphasises the importance of object-based authenticity for visitors motivated by a desire to undertake serious leisure (Bryce et al., 2015). For example, through enhanced

knowledge of the site, tourists motivated by a desire to experience serious leisure may expect to see physical evidence which complements their prior knowledge, thereby challenging site managers to package and present their service offerings in a way which recognises the existing knowledge and expectations of international visitors. Consequently, managers should ensure that artefacts key to conveying the object-based authenticity of sites are prominently displayed and highlighted throughout tourist marketing communication activities, and that locals are briefed accordingly in-situ at sites that they manage (Värlander, 2009).

Our findings also suggest that serious leisure motivations positively influence WOM recommendations of travel sites to others. This echoes extant literature suggesting levels of personal investment (an intrinsic aspect of serious leisure) (Stebbins, 1992) contributes positively to visitors' post-experience perceptions, hence rendering them more likely to recommend sites (Engel, Kegerreis, & Blackwell, 1969). This is further supported with previous research finding a relationship between serious leisure and visitor engagement (Bryce et al., 2015). Further, in the context of this research, personal investment is likely hindered by the additional visa and logistical barriers international visitors face when travelling to Iranian tourism destinations (Khodadadi & O'Donnell, 2017). Consequently, site managers may seek to capitalise on the serious leisure motivated visitors who travel to the Grand Bazaar Tabriz by generating links with related sites offering complementary experiences. For example, visitors could be directed to local archaeological museums or heritage offerings laden with objects and artefacts of interest to tourists, which may further complement the experiential nature of visiting the Bazaar. Additionally, site managers should ensure appropriate levels of supplementary information are offered to serious leisure motivated visitors, who are more likely to possess knowledge of the site they visit through pre-travel preparation, and whose expectations can influence their propensity to recommend such travel to others (Gannon et al., 2017). Practically, this could take the form of opening

the site up to further historical investigation, and engaging with media to communicate the history of the complex to wider audiences.

Object-based authenticity was found to positively influence existential authenticity, building on prior understanding of this relationship in European (Kolar & Žabkar, 2010), Chinese (Zhou et al., 2013), and Japanese (Bryce et al., 2015) contexts. This relationship suggests that existential authenticity, and the perceived emotions accompanying tourist sites, can be enhanced by physical, artefactual evidence. This further highlights the inherent advantage that sites imbued with object-based authenticity can possess. Consequently, this raises questions for sites of low, or limited object-based authenticity in Iranian and related cultural contexts. Such sites may face additional challenges generating existential authenticity perceptions amongst visitors with serious leisure motivations. As such, this study echoes Taheri et al. (2017) in suggesting that such sites should focus on embracing re-construction or repair, and that managers of such sites should focus on projecting a strong sense of brand heritage given their inherent dearth of opportunities to take advantage of object-based authenticity.

The results suggest that object-based authenticity has a positive influence on WOM recommendations. This extends our understanding of authenticity outcomes, which has previously been shown to include loyalty (Kolar & Žabkar, 2010; Yi et al., 2016), engagement, and commitment (Bryce et al., 2015). Conversely, existential authenticity was not found to hold a significant relationship with WOM recommendations. This contradicts related studies in China and Europe demonstrating a weak but positive relationship between existential authenticity and loyalty (Kolar & Žabkar, 2010; Yi et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2013), and strong existential authenticity relationships identified in the Japanese context with loyalty and commitment (Bryce et al., 2015; Taheri et al., 2017). This incongruence between existential authenticity and WOM recommendations could be accounted for by culturally

bespoke interpretations and outcomes relating to authenticity. Of the demographic control variables, only age was noted to have a significant, negative influence on WOM recommendation propensity, reiterating the important role of homophily in relation to age in stimulating WOM recommendations (Brown et al., 2007).

The findings contribute to extant research by identifying WOM recommendations as an outcome of object-based authenticity, and by developing awareness of the need to conduct culturally specific research around perceptions and outcomes of authentic service provision in a tourism context. Specifically, the results of this research suggest that serious leisure motivates visitors to attend Iranian tourist sites and suggests that there is a positive relationship between serious leisure and perceptions of object-based authenticity. Significantly, existential authenticity is found to be negatively related to tourist WOM recommendations; an unexpected result when compared with recent studies conducted in Japan and China (Zhou et al., 2013; Bryce et al., 2015), but perhaps indicative of the importance of culturally and contextually specific investigation. Nevertheless, the findings of this study offer guidance to service site managers regarding the importance of satisfying serious leisure motivations with appropriately calibrated and carefully conveyed authentic offerings.

Limitations and future research

This study provides a platform for further research thanks, in part, to its limitations. While derived from supporting literature, not all hypothesised relationships in the model were directly supported. For example, a negative relationship between existential authenticity and WOM recommendation was found. However, this raises interesting questions pertaining to the cultural specificity of authenticity perceptions, which would benefit from additional investigation. The results, generated using PLS-SEM, should be further tested via alternative

methodological approaches, such as in-depth interviews, in order to generate an additional layer of understanding and to draw out any factors unidentified in extant literature.

The generalisability of the study is also limited by its focus on one site: the Tabriz Grand Bazaar. Future research should assess the effectiveness of the model in relation to the different nationalities of visitors, to determine the extent of cultural influence, and whether site managers should look more closely at how they culturally attune sites for particular cultural groups. Similarly, the commercial focus of the bazaar setting could be countered by applying the model at religious or political tourism service settings. Further, the model presented should be extended in the aforementioned settings to build upon previous studies in non-Islamic cultural contexts which suggest that additional constructs, such as cultural motivations, propensity for heritage-related behaviours, and brand heritage may influence visitors' perceptions of authenticity (Bryce et al., 2015; Taheri et al., 2017; Yi et al., 2016). Additionally, the application of the model in alternative geographical contexts may offer insight into the breadth and complexity of tourism and service provision in an Islamic context, and could increase understanding of the interplay between serious leisure and authenticity perceptions in both the developed and developing world. Finally, the study focused on informants fluent in English. As such, future research should administer a survey in other languages, such as Arabic or French, in order to address this limitation.

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Tables and Figures

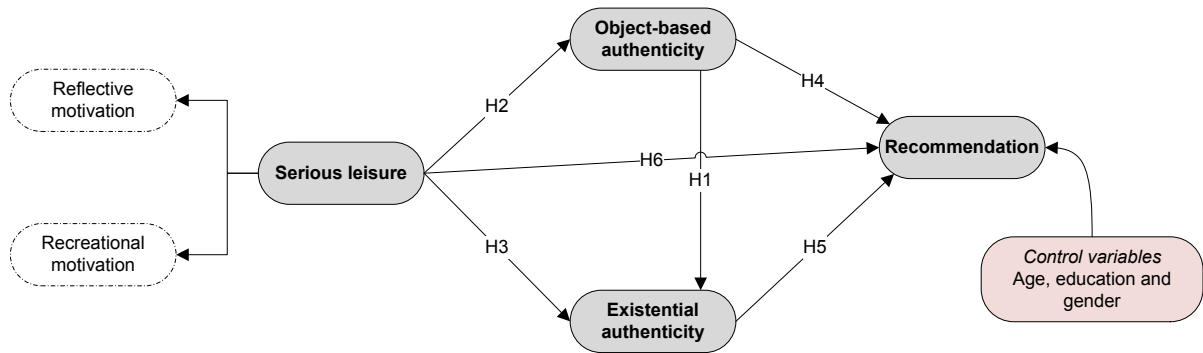


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Table 1. Reliability and convergent validity of reflective constructs

| Description of Items | Loading α S* | AVE | CR |
|--|---------------------------|------|------|
| <i>Reflective motivation- Dimension 1 of serious leisure</i> | .831 | .703 | .888 |
| Visiting Tabriz Bazaar helps me to express who I am | .760 | | |
| Visiting Tabriz Bazaar allows me to display my knowledge and expertise on certain subjects | .769 | | |
| Visiting Tabriz Bazaar has a positive effect on how I feel about myself | .870 | | |
| Visiting Tabriz Bazaar allows me to interact with others who are interested in the same things as me | .859 | | |

| | | | |
|---|------|------|------|
| <i>Recreational motivation- Dimension 2 of serious leisure</i> | .726 | .548 | .828 |
| Visiting Tabriz Bazaar is a lot of fun | .795 | | |
| I get a lot of satisfaction from visiting Tabriz Bazaar | .792 | | |
| I find visiting Tabriz Bazaar a refreshing experience | .715 | | |
| Visiting Tabriz Bazaar is an enriching experience for me | .648 | | |
| <i>Object-based authenticity</i> | .888 | .750 | .923 |
| The overall architecture and impression of the Bazaar inspired me. | .900 | | |
| I like the design and structure of the Bazaar. | .900 | | |
| I liked the way the Bazaar blends with the attractive landscape/scenery/historical ensemble/town, which offers many other interesting places for sightseeing. | .850 | | |
| I liked the information about the Bazaar and found it interesting | .811 | | |
| <i>Existential authenticity</i> | .895 | .703 | .922 |
| I liked special arrangements, events, concerts, celebrations connected to the Bazaar | .794 | | |
| This visit provided a thorough insight into the Bazaar site's historical era | .805 | | |
| During the visit I felt connected with the related | .874 | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|------|------|------|------|--|--|--|--|
| history | | | | | | | | |
| I enjoyed the spiritual experience | .866 | | | | | | | |
| I liked the crowded and busy atmosphere during the visit. | .794 | | | | | | | |
| I felt connected with human history and civilization | .852 | | | | | | | |
| <i>WOM recommendation</i> | | .759 | .630 | .857 | | | | |
| I will say positive things about this Bazaar to other people | .772 | | | | | | | |
| I will recommend this Bazaar to someone who seeks my advice | .914 | | | | | | | |
| I will encourage friends and relatives to go to this Bazaar | .935 | | | | | | | |
| I'm likely to spread positive word-of-mouth about this Bazaar | .858 | | | | | | | |

Notes: Significant at $*t > 3.29$ at $p < .001$.

Table 2. Discernment validity

| | (a) | (b) | (c) | (d) | (e) | (f) | Mean | SD |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----|-------|-------|
| (a)Existential authenticity | .839 | | | | | | 5.427 | .969 |
| (b)Object-based authenticity | .551 | .866 | | | | | 3.493 | 1.026 |
| (c)WOM recommendation | .460 | .601 | .794 | | | | 5.162 | .951 |
| (d)Recreational motivation | .644 | .513 | .531 | .740 | | | 4.270 | .631 |
| (e)Reflective motivation | .596 | .313 | .305 | .568 | .816 | | 5.726 | 1.007 |

(f) Serious leisure .579 .452 .457 .507 .519 **n/a** n/a n/a

Notes: Square root of AVE is presented on the diagonal of the matrix in bold. Since serious leisure was specified as a higher-order construct, AVE value for serious leisure construct is absent (n/a).

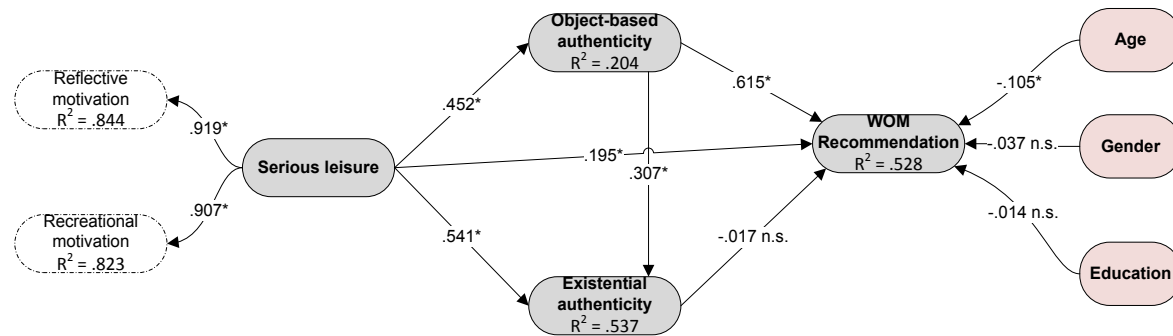


Figure 2. Results of PLS-SEM (Significant at $t > 3.29$ at $p < .001$, n.s. = non-significant).

Table 3. Assessments of direct paths

| Direct path | Path coefficient | <i>t</i> -values | <i>f</i> ² |
|---|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Existential authenticity -> WOM recommendation | -.017 | .302 | n/a |
| Object-based authenticity -> Existential authenticity | .307 | 7.899 | .162 |
| Object-based authenticity -> WOM recommendation | .615 | 19.248 | .546 |
| Serious leisure -> Existential authenticity | .541 | 12.529 | .502 |
| Serious leisure -> Object-based authenticity | .452 | 12.541 | .257 |
| Serious leisure -> WOM recommendation | .195 | 3.768 | .042 |
| <i>Control variables</i> | | | |
| Age -> WOM recommendation | -.105 | 3.391 | n/a |
| Education -> WOM recommendation | -.037 | 1.415 | n/a |
| Gender -> WOM recommendation | -.014 | .537 | n/a |

Notes: Significant at $t > 1.96$ at $p < .05$; $t > 2.57$ at $p < .01$; $t > 3.29$ at $p < .001$